

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
73544 Hwy 64
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-110-2005-018-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional): CO-936-2823-JM-EA99

PROJECT NAME: Dry Ridge Hazardous Fuels Reduction

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: 2S 97W sec. 29, 30, 31, 32
3S 97W sec. 6, 7
3S 98W sec. 1, 12, 13, 14, 23, 24, 26

APPLICANT: Department of Interior (DOI), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), White River Field Office (WRFO)

ISSUES AND CONCERNS (optional): None

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Background/Introduction: The Dry Ridge area located within the D5-W Cathedral Bluffs/Roan Plateau fire management polygon has a historically high wildfire occurrence. Current fuel conditions in the vicinity create a significant safety hazard for suppression resources responding to incidents within the proposed target area. Improving existing roads and constructing safety zones is needed to minimize the potential for entrapment of firefighting personnel.

Proposed Action: Improve travel corridors, by thinning a width of 25' along the two existing ridge roads, (16 miles for 95 acres), and constructing 9 safety zones, approximately 2-3 acres each, (27 acres), utilizing hand thinning techniques, (i.e. chainsaws) and removing slash by piling and burning under desired prescriptive parameters and smoke dispersal forecasts.

Mitigation:

1. Adverse smoke impacts will be mitigated by limiting number of piles ignited each day to 30-35 and building piles no larger than 400 cubic feet in size.
2. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are

uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

3. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.
4. Clearing of vegetation associated with the nine safety zones will be initiated after 15 July to avoid disturbance of nesting birds.
5. The applicant shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid wastes generated by the proposed actions.
6. Burning of slash and sawdust piles should be done either with snow cover or under conditions of maximum soil moisture to minimize negative impacts to existing desirable herbaceous species.
7. Revegetate all areas of disturbance including all nine safety zones and burned areas with Native Seed mix #3 from White River ROD/RMP Appendix B, Table B-2.
8. The Fire crew should monitor the area for the occurrence of noxious weeds during and after project implementation. Any noxious weeds or cheatgrass which occur on site should be promptly eradicated.
9. Burn pile and slash prior to the next growing season.

10. The Colorado “One Call” program will need be enacted before starting burning procedures (800-922-1987) for utility location.
11. Notify White River Electric of the proposed burn plan in order to determine the effects this action will have on their power line.
12. Notify Rio Blanco County Road and Bridge department to cover any requirements that they will require.

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, hazardous fuel reduction activities would not occur and high risk of entrapment of suppression resources would remain.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD:

Mechanical treatments utilizing a hydro-axe or other comparable heavy equipment were analyzed but not considered due to economic constraints and negative environmental impacts.

NEED FOR THE ACTION: To provide safe access/egress and safety zones for fire suppression resources responding to either Appropriate Management Response or Fire Use wildfire incidents within the D5-W Cathedral Bluffs/Roan Plateau polygon of the White River Field Office Fire Management Plan.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: 2-55

Decision Language: “Manage fire to protect public health, safety, and property as well as allowing fire to carry out important ecological functions.” “Utilize prescribed fire, both natural and management ignited, to protect, maintain and enhance ecosystems, economic values, and multiple use resource management programs.”

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a

finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment: Air quality is not currently being monitored in the project area, however it is considered to be within the national and Colorado air quality standards. There are two class 1 (visibility) areas located in northwest Colorado including the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness 98 miles to the northeast and the Flat Tops Wilderness 48 miles to the east.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Both prescribed and wildland fires are potentially a significant source of air pollution emissions including particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, and carbon monoxide.

Under the proposed action, all fire activities will be conducted within existing laws that protect air quality. Specifically, all fire activities must comply with the applicable air quality regulations required by FLPMA, the Clean Air Act, and the Colorado Air Quality Commission. By complying with applicable air quality standards and regulations, impacts to air quality will be short term and considered acceptable.

Prescribed fires are typically smaller than uncontrolled wildfires occurring during peak burning conditions and typically involve less total combustion than wildfires as a result of the more mesic conditions under which prescribed fires are conducted. This results in less over all smoke production. Also, prescribed fires are conducted under atmospheric conditions that will promote air pollutant dispersion.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: The direct environmental consequences associated from this project will obviously be absent in the no action alternative. However, greater long term consequences could occur as a result of increasing potential for large scale uncontrolled wildfires. Uncontrolled wildfires tend to produce more smoke as a result of more fuel consumption, their larger size, and longer burning duration. A large wildfire in this area has the potential to impact the two class 1 designated areas.

Mitigation: None

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: Proposed safety zones 1 through 9 have been inventoried at the Class III (100% pedestrian) level with no cultural resources identified in any of the proposed safety zones.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: It does not appear that the proposed safety zones will impact any known cultural resources.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no new impacts to cultural resources under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: None

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: There are no known noxious weeds in the project area. The invasive alien cheatgrass occurs in scattered locations near the project area primarily associated with unvegetated areas of soil disturbance adjacent to roads.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: There will be some soil disturbance associated with cutting, piling and burning. There will be no long term negative impact if the stated mitigation is applied.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: None

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The project area is encompassed by young to mid-aged pinyon-juniper woodlands. Several species of migratory birds fulfill nesting requirements in this community from late May through mid July. Birds of higher conservation interest associated with pinyon-juniper woodlands (i.e., Colorado Partners in Flight program) include black-throated gray warbler, violet-green swallow, juniper titmouse, pinyon jay and gray flycatcher; all of which are abundant and widely distributed throughout the Resource Area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Removal of vegetation associated with the nine safety zones will be initiated after 15 July and therefore should have no influence on nesting activities of migratory birds. Thinning of trees associated with this project will involve the removal of large limbs which may obstruct vehicle travel along the existing roadways. Although thinning will occur during the nesting season, it is unlikely to negatively impact nesting birds as nest density tends to be reduced in close proximity of roads.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no affect on migratory birds under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: None

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: There are no threatened, endangered or sensitive animal species that inhabit or derive important benefit from the area potentially influenced by the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on animals listed, proposed, candidate, or petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Similarly, there are no animals considered sensitive by BLM that would be potentially influenced by this action.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no conceivable influence on special status species under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: The proposed and no action alternatives would have no effective influence on populations or habitat associated with special status species and would be consistent with the long term maintenance of animal and plant land health standards.

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: There are no known hazardous or other solid wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been used, stored or disposed of at sites included in the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: No listed or extremely hazardous materials in excess of threshold quantities are proposed for use in this project. While commercial preparations of fuels and lubricants proposed for use may contain some hazardous constituents, they would be stored, used and transported in a manner consistent with applicable laws, and the generation of hazardous wastes would not be anticipated. Solid wastes would be properly disposed of.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No hazardous or other solid wastes would be generated under the no-action alternative.

Mitigation: None

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes a finding on Standard 5)

Affected Environment: The proposed project is in Little Dry Gulch, Dry Gulch, Fawn Creek; and East Fork Canyon Creek; all of which are tributary to Black Sulfur Creek, Piceance Creek and the White River. The project boundary intersects two stream segments identified in the Classification and Numeric Standards. They are segment 20, the mainstem of Black Sulphur and Hunter Creeks from their sources to their confluences with Piceance Creek and segment 19, Mainstem of Fawn Creek from the source to the confluence with Black Sulphur Creek.

A review of the Colorado's 1989 Nonpoint Source Assessment Report (plus updates), the 305(b) report, the 303(d) list and the Unified Watershed Assessment was done to see if any water quality concerns have been identified. All actions are within the White River watershed.

Segment 20, has been classified as Aquatic Life Cold 1, Recreation 2, and Agriculture. The state has further defined water quality parameters with table values. These standards reflect the ambient water quality and define maximum allowable concentrations for the various water quality parameters. The anti-degradation rule applies to this segment meaning no further water quality degradation is allowable that would interfere with or become harmful to the designated uses. Segment 19, the State has classified this segment as "Use Protected". They further classify this segment as Cold Aquatic Life 2, Recreation 1b, and Agriculture. The antidegradation review requirements in the Antidegradation Rule are not applicable to waters designated use-protected. For those waters, only the protection specified in each reach will apply. For this reach, minimum standards for three parameters have been listed. These parameters are: dissolved oxygen = 6.0 mg/l, pH = 6.5 - 9.0 and Fecal Coliform = 325/100ml and E. coli = 205/100ml.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Infiltration rates are likely to decline following fires and could cause an increase in overland flows. Flashy runoff can be expected in bare areas that are subjected to high intense storms immediately after burning. These runoff events are the major water quality hazard of fires, because of an increase in erosion and sediment yields.

Impacts to Dry Gulch and Fawn Creek are expected to be minimal since the drainage area is relatively small. It is unlikely adverse affects on water quality and quantity would occur as a result of the proposed manipulations. Prescribed burns can result in vegetation rejuvenation and/or conversions which are hydrologically beneficial.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Impacts are not anticipated from the no-action alternative, except that the potential for wildfire is greater. Wild fire would result in impacts similar to those described under the proposed action, only of greater intensity.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality: The water quality of Box Elder Gulch is well within the standards set by the state.

FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on Standard 2)

Affected Environment: The 100 year floodplains in the Piceance Basin were mapped by the Army Corp of Engineers during the early 80's. Accordingly, the project encompasses Little Dry Gulch and Fawn Creek 100 year floodplains. There are no wetlands or riparian areas that would be affected by the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Impacts to the 100 year floodplain of Dry Gulch and Fawn Creek are expected to be minimal if any. The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on wetlands or riparian habitat.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no affect on riparian or wetland habitats under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on the condition or function of riparian or wetland habitats and therefore would have no influence on continued maintenance of associated land health standards.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:

No ACEC's, prime and unique farmlands, Wilderness, or Wild and Scenic Rivers, threatened, endangered or sensitive plants exist within the area affected by the proposed action. For threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species Public Land Health Standard is not applicable since neither the proposed nor the no-action alternative would have any influence on populations of, or habitats potentially occupied by, special status plants. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: The soils have been mapped by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in an Order III soil survey. The survey is available for review at WRFO.

Soil Number	Soil Name	Slope	Ecological site	Salinity	Run Off	Erosion Potential	Bedrock
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Soil Number	Soil Name	Slope	Ecological site	Salinity	Run Off	Erosion Potential	Bedrock
6	Barcus channery loamy sand	2-8%	Foothills Swale	<2	Slow	Moderate	>60
36	Glendive fine sandy loam		Foothills Swale	2-4	Slow	Slight	>60
41	Havre loam	0-4%	Foothill Swale	<4	Medium	Slight	>60
43	Irigul-Parachute complex	12-45%	Loamy Slopes /Mountain Loam	<2	Rapid	Slight to high	10-20
64	Piceance fine sandy loam	5-15%	Rolling Loam	<2	Medium	Moderate to high	20-40
70	Redcreek-Rentsac complex	5-30%	PJ woodlands/PJ woodlands	<2	Very high	Moderate to high	10-20
73	Rentsac channery loam	5-50%	Pinyon-Juniper woodlands	<2	Rapid	Moderate to very high	10-20
91	Torriorthents-Rock Outcrop complex	15-90%	Stoney Foothills	--	Rapid	Very high	10-20

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Impacts from the proposed vegetation manipulation are not anticipated. The effects of prescribed burning (slash) on soils is directly related to the depth and intensity of soil heating as well as vegetation removal which exposes the soil to wind and water erosion. Conducting this burn under desired prescriptive parameters (while soil and live fuel moisture is high) and smoke dispersal forecasts, combined with light to moderate fuel loading, will result in lower surface temperatures and short burning duration. As a result, soil heating should not be severe enough to cause significant changes in physical properties of the soil, mortality of perennial grasses and forbs, and mortality of the seed bed. It is anticipated that soil erosion will increase for one to three growing seasons post burn due to increased soil surface exposure. Within that time frame herbaceous vegetation cover should increase above pre-burn levels resulting in increased soil stability, water infiltration, and reduced soil erosion.

Another related effect of implementing the proposed action is the reduced chance of large fire occurrence and improved ability for wildland fires to be managed under moderate environmental conditions.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no direct impact to soils under this alternative. However, the threat of large fires occurring under extremely dry conditions would continue to exist. The scale and duration of adverse soil impacts is much higher under extreme burning conditions associated with large fire occurrence.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: Soils within the burn units and allowable area are currently meeting Public Land Health Standards. These small prescribed treatments will cause a short term increase in soil erosion by decreasing canopy cover and surface litter. However, since soil heating should not be severe, organic content of the soil should remain high, canopy cover should increase with vigorous desirable perennial grasses and forbs, and plant diversity should increase from current conditions. It is anticipated that by

implementing this proposed action the long term effect should improve the indicators for the upland soils standard.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The areas proposed for treatment are primarily dense mid and young age stands of pinyon –juniper woodlands with a sparse, decadent browse and herbaceous species.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Vegetation in the project area can be considered to be both decadent and monotypic. The proposed project should add some diversity to the structure and composition of the existing vegetation. Project implementation will also provide some buffer zones which, in the event of a wildfire in extreme conditions, may reduce the chance of a total stand-consuming wildfire, thereby creating more of a mosaic if a fire occurs.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Plant communities in the project area marginally meet the Standard and will likely benefit from project implementation.

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: There are no aquatic habitats affected by the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on aquatic wildlife or habitat.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no affect on aquatic wildlife or associated habitats under the no action alternative.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): The proposed action would have no conceivable influence on the condition or function of aquatic wildlife or associated habitats and therefore would have no influence on continued maintenance of associated land health standards.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The project area, which is encompassed by young to mid-aged pinyon-juniper woodlands, falls within normal big game winter range. These areas are primarily occupied by big game from September through December, and again in April and May. While raptors may opportunistically forage throughout the area, these younger-aged stands typically do not provide adequate nesting substrate for woodland raptors. Raptor surveys were conducted during late-April by BLM biologists. No raptor nests were observed. Small mammal populations and distribution are poorly documented; however, the species potentially occurring throughout this site are widely distributed throughout the State and the Great Basin or Rocky Mountain regions. No narrowly distributed or highly specialized species or subspecific populations are known to occur in the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action is not expected to result in any adverse effects to terrestrial wildlife. Construction of the nine safety zones would result in the removal of approximately 27 acres of pinyon-juniper and big sagebrush, species which do not represent big game winter forage. Removal of woody overstory will potentially promote the redevelopment of understory shrub and ground cover components, leading to incremental benefits for big game, particularly during late fall and early spring.

Reductions in the continuity and extent of submature woodlands and tree regeneration as small treatments scattered throughout the project area would tend to mimic an accumulation of natural burns and is not expected to have any effective influence on the abundance or distribution of nongame populations at any landscape scale.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No habitat loss or increased disturbance to deer and elk and other wildlife would occur at this time and this place.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): The project site meets the land health standard for terrestrial communities. The project as proposed would have no functional influence on attributes of community health.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation		X	
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management			X
Forest Management			X

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Geology and Minerals	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement		X	
Noise	X		
Paleontology		X	
Rangeland Management		X	
Realty Authorizations			X
Recreation			X
Socio-Economics		X	
Visual Resources			X
Wild Horses	X		

FIRE MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The Dry Ridge fuel reduction project lies within the D5 Cathedral Bluffs/Roan Plateau fire management polygon. “D” polygons are areas where fire is desired and there are few constraints to its use. The two ridge lines between Dry Gulch and Fawn Creek are heavily vegetated with dense canopy young pinion/juniper. Much of the woodlands on these ridges average 10-20 tons/acre of litter and dead and down woody material. The project area rates as a fire regime III and a condition class II or III due to the large number of PJ stems per acre. From 1994-2003 there were 21 ignitions within the project area consuming 34 acres.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: In the ten year period analyzed there were an average of two starts per year within the project area. The potential is there for a major wildland fire event, either a wildland fire use (within prescription) or a wildfire which will require suppression actions. In both cases there will be a need to access the area by fire personnel to monitor the fire or to take suppression actions. The proposed action will improve access and egress for fire vehicles and safety zones for personnel during runs made by a wildfire event.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the current condition. In the event of a wildland fire event in the area, current conditions in the vicinity would continue to create a significant safety hazard for suppression resources responding to incidents within the proposed target area. The potential for entrapment of firefighting personnel and large catastrophic fires will remain. The over all condition of the area will continue to progress toward fire regime condition class 3.

Mitigation: None

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The majority of the project site is made up of immature pinyon/juniper woodlands. The project does pass through mature woodlands which are considered as non-commercial. The woodlands in the project area do provide some firewood, fence posts and Christmas trees to the local population.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The project would remove primarily young pinyon and juniper trees with little recoverable products. On the mature stands there would be materials suitable for use, mainly firewood. Past thinning projects have been promoted to the public and the residues have been harvested.

Harvesting of the trees may increase suitable habitat for bark beetles and insect populations are expected to increase as a result. The increase in bark beetles may kill a few trees immediately adjacent to the project.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: None

REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS

Affected Environment: There are two rights-of-way and three county roads affected by the Dry Ridge Hazardous Fuels Reduction.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: In T. 2 S., R. 97 W., Section 30 contains a power line right-of-way held by White River Electric, COC15116. In T. 2 S., R. 97 W., Section 7, Riata Energy has a pipeline right-of-way, COC40605. This pipeline is also in T. 3 S., R. 98 W., Section 1 and 12 (COC40605), plus White River Electric's power line (COC15116). Rio Blanco County Road and Bridge needs to be informed of this action since there are three county roads, 29, 87, 69 are in the fuels reduction area.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: Under the no action alternative, there would not be any impacts.

Mitigation: None

VISUAL RESOURCE

Affected Environment: The proposed action is within a VRM class III area. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action is not visible from any key observation points along existing Rio Blanco County roads therefore VRM III objectives will be met.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No impact on visual resources.

Mitigation: None.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:

BLM has, and will continue to treat areas of heavy fuels throughout the White River Resource Area in accordance with the White River Fire Management Plan (BLM 1999). Treating various areas of heavy fuels will reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfire by transforming a running crown fire back to the surface, where suppression efforts can be more effective. Once the proposed action has been implemented, BLM can more safely treat other areas in the vicinity that have heavy or unnatural fuels buildup, using prescribed fire or fire use. This would further reduce the potential of wildfire damage to industrial facilities in the area and continue to allow fire to assume its natural role within the ecosystem.

By implementing the proposed action and other hazardous fuel reduction actions BLM will achieve a mosaic landscape with varying seral vegetation classes which result in a more fire resistant landscape, more vegetative age class diversity, and healthier rangelands. Since the inception of the National Fire Plan in 1999 BLM White River Field Office has treated approximately 16,400 acres of hazardous fuels utilizing prescribed fire, wildland fire use, and mechanical means. This coupled with the design criteria and the small overall percentage of public land being treated result in no significant cumulative impacts.

REFERENCES:

1. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) White River Field Office. (1999). White River Fire Management Plan: Environmental Assessment Record Number CO-017-WR-99-99-EA. Available upon request from the White River Field Office, 73544 Hwy 64, Meeker, CO. Phone 970-878-3800. Email wrfo_webmail@co.blm.gov.
2. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) White River Resource Area, Colorado. (1997). White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan. Available on the BLM Colorado Web site: <http://www.co.blm.gov/nepa/rmpdocs/wrfdocs/wrformp.htm>
3. Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture (DOI, USDA). (2000). Stereo Photo Series for Quantifying Natural Fuels Volume IV: Pinyon-Juniper, Chaparral, and Sagebrush Types in the Southwestern United States. National Wildfire Coordinating Group PMS 833, NEFS 1084. 28-31 p.

4. USDI Bureau of Land Management, Wyoming State Office, Division of Lands and Renewable Resources (1991) Simple Approach Smoke Estimation Model (SASEM) – Version 3.50.
5. Hann, Wendel, Havlina, Doug, Shlisky, Ayn, et al. 2003. Interagency and The Nature Conservancy fire regime condition class website .USDA Forest Service, US Department of the Interior, The Nature Conservancy, and Systems for Environmental Management [frcc.gov].

PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED: None

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Air Quality
Tamara Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Tamara Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Michael Selle	Archeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species, Vegetation, Rangeland Management
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Bo Brown	Hazmat Collateral	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness
Caroline Hollowed	Hydrologist	Soils
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Terrestrial and Aquatic
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Access and Transportation
Ken Holsinger/Garner Harris	Natural Resource Specialist/Zone Fire Management Officer	Fire Management
Robert Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Penny Brown	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources
Valerie Dobrich	Natural Resource Specialist	Wild Horses

Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE: The environmental assessment and analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

This determination is based on the following:

Factors Considered	Potential Impact	Reasons the Impact is not Adversely Significant
Public Health and Safety	Firefighter and public safety will be improved on approximately 6800 acres due to the reduced risk of destructive wildland fire.	The proposed action would not significantly affect public health and safety but would reduce current and expected risks.
Cultural Resources	Cultural resource surveys have been completed and no sites of scientific importance were identified within the treatment areas. Design Criteria will prevent impacts to existing sites and project provisions will provide protection if new sites are discovered during project implementation (EA page 3).	Non-significant because no sites will be impacted.
Wildlife	BLM biologists determined that pinyon-juniper targeted for treatment is too young to support nesting raptors. (EA pages 10).	The proposed action will not impact nesting raptors.
Air Quality	Smoke from the prescribed burn may slightly diminish air quality for a short time period when burning operations are being conducted. This impact will be localized and not effect people or other resources. (EA pages 2-3)	The proposed action will be conducted under atmospheric conditions that will promote air pollutant dispersion and will not adversely affect people and other resources.

DECISION/RATIONALE: It is my decision to approve implementation of the White River Dry Ridge Fuel Reduction project as described in the proposed action. This will result in a reduced fuel loading and risk of exposure to fire personnel. The proposed action will also result in greater latitude in managing future wildland and prescribed fire in the vicinity of the project. This action is in compliance with decisions in the White River ROD/RMP, the White River Fire Management Plan and environmental impacts are expected to be minimal.

NAME OF PREPARER: Garner Harris (Unit Fire Management Officer)
Ken Holsinger (Natural Resource Specialist)

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Caroline Hollowed

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: For *Trute M. Paris*
Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: *May 20, 2005*

ATTACHMENTS: Map of the Proposed Action and Location

